

NOT THE RIGHTEOUS!

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by Jack Odell

"For I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance" Matthew 9:13

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Chapter 4

Dick Lane . . . who bore the marks

IF ONE NEEDED MATERIAL ON "THE ESSENCE" OF SIN, Dick Lane would be a useful exhibit. It isn't merely that he was a criminal. What other criminals did, he overdid. He was cruel for the sake of cruelty itself. Through his career a line of brutality reaches back from Lane to Cain; a bloody streak that could only be washed clean in Blood. His character doesn't make sense in any terms but sin. No painful experience in his early life shows why Dick Lane was a deliberately cruel man.

Around the turn of the century, he was one of the best safe blowers in the business.

Even the best get caught, and he was well known by the police of a dozen cities. Because he was brilliant and daring as well as cruel, the police reporters often discussed him among themselves. At last he came to the attention of a Chicago newspaper executive. This man decided Dick was worth saving. He made up his mind to offer the safe blower a job and a chance to go straight.

A reporter passed the word to the underworld, and Dick agreed to a meeting. It took place in a cafe. The two men sized each other up for a moment, then the businessman opened the conversation.

"Lane, you just don't look the type. Why don't you change your line from burglary to business?"

Dick Lane sneered.

"Put the money in the safe for some other guy to steal? Do I look stupid?"

"No, and you don't look like a criminal, either." Lane's eyes glittered. "Looks are very deceiving, mister."

His voice purred. "Look at you, for instance. You look like a two-bit pickpocket."

That was Dick Lane. He never missed a chance to be cruel.

"Lane - it doesn't matter what you think I look like. We're here to talk about helping you. Don't you want help?"

"Not the kind you want to give me." The executive tried again.

"Listen, Lane - if you'd make good in one legitimate job, the law would get off your back."

"How do you mean?"

"You're in Chicago on a twenty-four hour time limit. You can be picked up on sight. Now, if you'll go to work in my circulation department, I'll ask the Commissioner to drop that pickup order."

"Sure," Dick laughed, "he'll say 'yes' and the coppers'll pick me up the next day. They're bigger crooks than I am."

"Give it a try, Lane. Give me a chance to help you." The safe blower pushed back his chair.

"Mister, I don't want your help, and I don't need it. Yours or anyone else's."

That was the interview. During the years that followed, other well-meaning men tried to give Dick a hand, but they all got the same answer.

Like all habitual criminals, Dick Lane was caught and imprisoned repeatedly. In penitentiaries he was known as a tough "con." The other prisoners hated him because he hated them.

He particularly hated the youngsters and enjoyed baiting young first offenders. When one of them tried to earn a good conduct parole, Dick set out to spoil his chances. He knew all the tricks - hiding his victim's tools, stealing his few possessions, muttering threats, even inflicting bodily injury when he could get away with it. Sooner or later, this persecution drove his victim to an outburst of fury. Then the good conduct record was ruined. Dick spoiled the efforts of a good many kids to rehabilitate themselves.

It was Lane's contempt for decency that led to the first crack in his self-assurance.

In Toledo, Ohio, an eighteen-year-old boy was converted to CHRIST. He read in his Bible a passage from the twenty-fifth chapter of Matthew:

"Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee? And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me."

Challenged by the Scripture, the boy went to visit prisoners in the city jail.

Smiling and friendly, he reached through the bars of a cell to offer his hand. The prisoner was Dick Lane.

"Beat it."

"Sit, I want to shake your hand."

Lane spat on the floor. "Beat it, kid, or I'll call the turnkey."

"Don't do that," the boy pleaded. "I've got good news for you."

"Such as?"

The lad stood close to the bars. "You can get out of all this!"

Lane looked quickly up and down the corridor. Then he cautioned, "Careful, kid!"

"But I mean it, mister. You can be free. I've just found out about it. It works, too!"

"Yeah?"

"You want to be out of all this, don't you?"

"Jail?"

"Yes, sir. Jail, and your life of crime - and sin. All of it!"

For just a moment, crafty Dick Lane had been taken in by his desire for freedom. Now he was suddenly cagey.

"Sin?" Lane breathed the word much too gently. "Yes, sir. It's sin that's holding you here. Not these bars."

"You mean it, kid?"

"I certainly do. Just as it was sin that nailed JESUS CHRIST to the Cross. Our sin nailed Him there because He wanted to set us free. I've just become a Christian; and I want you to be one too, because I want you to be free."

Lane's voice was silky. "You do?"

"Yes, sir." The boy's eyes were shining. "I'm free because I've put my faith in JESUS CHRIST - and I want you to be free like I am."

He faltered, then plunged ahead.

"I might have been afraid of someone like you before. But now I'm willing to do like Paul wrote and, **'bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus.'** Will you let me help you, sir?"

Dick Lane studied the earnest, freckled face for a long moment.

"Kid . . .?"

"Yes, sir?"

"Do you still want to shake hands with me?"

"Oh, yes sir. I certainly do!"

He gave his hand to the old cracksman.

Lane's shock-cord muscles clamped tight and twisted savagely. There was a sharp cry and a sickening snap of bone. Dick Lane released his grip and quietly stepped back.

Tears filled the boy's eyes as he looked first at his broken arm and then at the man in the cell.

Lane said, "You had to learn, kid." The boy's voice was twisted with pain.

"I'd let you break the other arm - if it would break the thing that's made you this way."

This was something Dick Lane couldn't endure.

"Get out of my sight! If I could get at you, I'd kill you!"

The boy said, "I guess you've showed me - what Paul really meant."

"What are you talkin' about?"

"Henceforth let no man trouble me: for I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus."

The boy left quietly, and the safe cracker never saw him again.

But the snapping bone seemed to have snapped something inside Dick Lane. From that time he aged rapidly, and his cold assurance oozed away. The underworld paid well for each job, but he began noticing that his hands shook as he placed his explosive charges of "soup." With his nerves failing, he passed more and more of the tough jobs along to younger men.

The word went out that Dick Lane was cracking up, and within months he was a beaten, frightened has-been in the world of crime. Still he had to keep moving. Policemen refused to let the sun set on Dick Lane in their jurisdiction, and he was nudged from town to town.

Chicago still allowed him twenty-four hours. He took advantage of that allowance to call on the newspaperman whose help he'd once refused.

That man understood the meaning of "the second mile."

Dick left the office with the first legitimate job he'd ever held. He had been made a receiving clerk on the old Chicago Record-Herald. When he convinced the Chicago police he was actually on a payroll, they lifted the twenty-four hour limit.

By some standards, old Dick was a free man. But this kind of freedom was a bitter thing because he was still shackled - to himself and to sin. On the job, he was too busy to think much about himself. His troubles began in the evening. With nothing to do, he walked the streets for hours at a time, always lonely and troubled by old memories. With his toughness gone, he couldn't shake the memories off, and they left him afraid and ashamed. At times he found himself almost running, but he didn't know what it was he was running from.

He wondered if these nights of walking alone were affecting his sanity. The time came when he was desperate for companionship.

That night, as he passed the lighted door of the Pacific Garden Mission, Dick stopped on the pavement to listen to the sound of people singing. As he stood, someone touched his arm.

"Hello. Come on in. You're just in time for the service." The man was young and tall, with a friendly grin. His smile may have reminded Dick of that other young face in the Toledo jail. Lane hesitated, then nodded and followed him into the Mission.

Once, during the hymns, Dick leaned over and whispered, "You put me in mind of another young fellow I knew once. He was a Christian boy, too. He wanted to help me."

"So do I, sir, if you'll let me."

After the meeting, they talked for a long time about his loneliness and his fears. Dick's new friend spoke of JESUS CHRIST, who said, " . . . **my peace I give unto you.**"

That night, kneeling at the altar of the old lighthouse, Dick Lane was led into a new life with CHRIST.

The Mission files describe the transformation that followed in the words, "glorious and amazing." The man whose lifelong hostility had shriveled into cowardice became a courageous and saintly man of GOD!

Dick found a small furnished room near the Mission.

There was plenty of work to fill his free time. Every boy in trouble "put him in mind" of the one whose arm he'd broken, and over the years he helped scores of them.

When a homeless boy needed shelter, the old man was always willing to share his quarters. Some of these young guests were frightened and sick, others tough and defiant. Either way, he worked patiently to lead them to his Lord JESUS. There was always a little left out of his salary to help them.

One of the tough ones was a big, defiant redhead. He figured Dick for an easy mark and cooked up a hard luck story. His mother was dying, he said, and he needed fifteen dollars for a railroad ticket to his home town.

Dick listened and nodded. He was willing to be "a fool for CHRIST." He knew that if Red was ever to be converted he must first see CHRIST in Dick. To get the money Red said he needed, they climbed the worn stairs to the old man's room.

Dick opened the door, stepped inside, and touched a match to the gas mantle on the wall.

"Want a cup of coffee, Red? Won't take but a minute."

"Just the fifteen bucks, Mr. Lane."

"Sure, Red." Dick paused. "Got some fresh doughnuts. How about a doughnut?"

"Just the dough. Have you got it, or is this a stall so you can read the Bible to me?"

Dick chuckled. "I'd like to read the Bible to you, Red. Nothing I'd like better. But we came here to get your fifteen dollars. Sooo . . ."

White-haired old Dick Lane turned away, reached behind the clock on the shelf, and took down a tin box. Behind him the boy drew a sharp, nervous breath.

"That where you keep your dough, Lane?"

Dick stood still. His lifetime experience of crime told him what was happening, yet his voice was gentle when he spoke.

"Yeah, Red. What little I've got. Why?"

A pistol shot answered. The old man slumped to the floor. Red reached for the tin box as it clattered against the dresser.

If Red hadn't been caught a few days later, we'd never know the story of those last few minutes. But it all came out in his confession to the police. Even after they typed out the confession and he signed it, Red still had something on his mind.

"You know - the old guy was kinda-funny."

"What do you mean?" the detective asked.

"What he said after he fell, when I grabbed the box."

"Yeah? What was it?"

"He says to me, 'Son, I'd give you more than that if I thought it would help you.'"

The young hoodlum paused, remembering.

"Then he says somethin' else. Maybe it was from the Bible. He was always readin' outa the Bible."

"So what did he say?" The detective was in a hurry.

"I remember it pretty good. It was somethin' like, '**No man can trouble me, for I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus.**'"

The boy paused again. "And then what, Red?"

"Then he died - real easy."

~ end of chapter 4 ~

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